

GENERAL SYNOD ELECTION 2021

ELECTION ADDRESS FOR Fr PETER WILLIAM FELLOWS / Diocese of Truro

Dear Electors,

Thank you for taking the time to read this statement. I hope the following information will help you understand where I have been, where I am and perhaps where we might all be going!!

I was ordained to the Diaconate in 1988 and to the Priesthood in 1989 having trained for two years at Chichester Theological College. This followed sixteen years in education which ended when the primary school of which I was the headteacher burnt down in 1985!!! It was in the playground as the school collapsed early in the morning that I answered the question "why aren't you a priest?" and remembered the words of Mother Lillian CSA who had quoted Isaiah 43 at a quiet day: *"because you are precious in my sight, and I love you"*.

As a same sex attracted man, the church had often seemed out of my grasp. I had been a Quaker for many years and then discovered St Martin-in-the Fields where I became a volunteer in the homeless persons unit and heard the words: *"God is there for those who have the door slammed in their face, those who are at the back of the queue"*. I was already a founder member of Gay Switchboard, a 24 hour guidance service and together with my headship responsibilities, running marathons and a loving and fulfilling relationship, life was good. Then my school burnt down and the excuse I used for not seeking a life as a priest was taken from me.

My title parish was St Stephen's, Rochester Row, Westminster, where I trained under Bishop Richard Chartres, then a parish priest. After five years, I was accepted for the prison chaplaincy service, but Bishop Peter (Woolwich) asked me to go to St Paul's Church, Deptford in South East London, where the incumbent, Fr David Diamond had died. It was an Anglo-Catholic shrine and an architectural gem. Taking over from Fr Diamond was a task nobody would accept, but I simply walked beside his memory, which was so precious to all of the community. In 2000 the church suffered a serious fire and the restoration project took five years and millions of pounds provided by the National Lottery, grants and donations.

In 2005, due to the need to care for my elderly mother and step-father I re-located to Cornwall and Bishop Bill (Truro) sent me to the Benefice of Redruth as the curate and with the instruction to close one of the five churches. ... I failed in this task as all the churches are flourishing!! In order that a priest for Redruth could be appointed and that the future of a dynamic youth project (SEARCHLIGHT) could be safeguarded, I retired seven years early, giving my word to the Bishop that I would continue to work full-time.

I am standing for General Synod because there are several 'platforms' which are of great importance to me:

1. EQUAL MARRIAGE: As a same sex attracted man who was in a committed relationship for 31 years, I didn't know what to write on the headstone of my beloved friend when he died. Then I heard the words spoken after the attack on the Bataclan Theatre in Paris, spoken by a man whose wife had died in the disaster: *"we will find each other again, in the paradise of the free"*. I knew what to write on my friend's headstone. I support equal marriage because so many LGBTQ+ people and other minority groups lead lives in which their true identity is hidden, their growth, faith and contribution to the world is often refused or ignored. The church now has an opportunity to rejoice in diversity and offer God's love to all through the sacrament of marriage, thus acknowledging God's equal love for all people.

2. CHAPLAINCY WITHIN CARE SETTINGS: Residential and Nursing Settings, together with other residential projects for different groups are remarkable places, as each one is a community in its own right. The residents, the staff, their families and their friends, visiting specialists and entertainers etc. make up a community as vibrant and as significant as any parish. The church through its leaders and volunteers may visit occasionally, perhaps to lead a service, sing hymns or sit and chat. That is valuable, but what would be more significant would be a named chaplain, ordained or lay, who would be given the time and the resources not only to involve themselves in activities, but also to be beside all members of the community, in their joys and sorrows, frustrations, tiredness and successes. To build a church in those special places where life is drawing to a close and friendships made can be very short lived. It is significant that prisons, hospitals, the armed forces, industrial settings and theatres all have chaplains, yet care settings do not.

3. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE: SEARCHLIGHT, the youth project of which I was a co-leader, and THE DON'T STOP BELIEVING YOUTH THEATRE PROJECT which I now co-lead offered and offers children and young people the chance to be encouraged, challenged and cared for. The members were and are involved in activities which build confidence, develop skills and enable God's love to surround them in a natural way as they grow in strength and explore the world. Such schemes could be reflected in many churches if enough clerical and lay people were enabled and given the resources to lead and encourage the children in their parishes. Choirs, adventures weeks, theatre weeks, Sunday Schools, regular outings, visits to care settings, involvement in worship and church festivals. All of this is possible and will gradually lead to an awareness of God's love for them and the world.

4. THE ENVIRONMENT: Churches and the surrounding land are vital resources within a parish. These environments provide opportunities for such things as: *outside liturgies, re-wilding, places of peace and tranquillity, a focus of prayer whenever the building is open, a site for community pantries, a meeting place, a place to encourage community groups to explore faith, a place of history and heritage.* Yet, so often our churches are locked and people simply pass by. Together we can make a difference, a difference to the environment, a difference to communities and a difference to the perception of the place of the church in a community and as a vehicle of God's love for all.